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Dr. Fairbairn's "Christ in Modern Theology."¹

WHEN it was announced that the Principal of Mansfield College was about to give to the world a work bearing this title, many persons, no doubt, shared the interest which the present writer felt as to the attitude which Dr. Fairbairn would take in reference to what is called "the new theology," which is now finding more or less distinct expression in a vast number of reputedly orthodox pulpits on both sides of the Atlantic. This modified orthodoxy, which is alarming the more conservative and fascinating the more adventurous spirits in many religious circles, is in its present phase an ambiguous and perplexing phenomenon. Its leading idea appears to be that religious experience, and the spiritual insight which it affords, are normal expressions of human nature; and that if, as seems to be fact, the Semitic mind, culminating in Jesus of Nazareth, revealed the personal relation between the finite and the universal spirit with a vividness and fulness to which no other section of mankind, before or since, has attained, this is not to be understood as meaning that the Eternal One has acted exceptionally and abnormally in the case of the Hebrew Prophets and of the son of Mary, but simply as meaning that the Old and New Testaments contain in their choicest passages the expression of the world's deepest religious consciousness; and that consequently it is as natural for religious people to seek and find inspiration and satisfaction in these most precious records of the representative religious minds of our race, as it is for people of a philosophic turn to have recourse to those great masters of Greek and German thought who have given most adequate response to the craving of the human mind for an intellectual conception of the unifying principle of the cosmos. It is quite in accordance with this leading idea that Dr. Lyman Abbott, who may be regarded as the coryphaeus of these "new" theologians, speaks of Jesus as "the world's greatest religious genius," in apparently just the same sense in which some persons speak of Shakespeare as the world's greatest dramatic genius, or of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, or Hegel, as the world's greatest philosopher. But if this be what Dr. Abbott and his coadjutors really mean, then there is nothing in the Biblical literature or in the life and teachings of Jesus which is at all foreign to human nature as such. The inestimable worth of the religious faith which finds utterance in the

¹ *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology.* By A. M. Fairbairn, M.A., D.D. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893.

Bible will lie, if Dr. Abbott's idea of Jesus as "the world's greatest religious genius" be consistently carried out, not in any wholly exceptional faculty and function which differentiates Jesus from other men, but simply in the fact that the relationship between the individual soul and God, which potentially exists in humanity, has in the case of the highest minds of the Hebrew race realised itself with pre-eminent purity and richness, and that, therefore, the sacred literature which embodies the deepest religious experiences of the human race, is naturally the source whence the soul draws greatest inspiration and help in its yearning to enter into felt personal intimacy with that eternal mind and heart which vivifies and unifies the cosmos.

But though this view of biblical revelation and of Jesus should logically follow from utterances such as that which we have quoted from Dr. Lynam Abbott, we find, as a matter of fact, that none of these new theologians are at all prepared to carry out their own fundamental principle consistently, and so to wholly humanise the nature and teachings of Jesus. Many passages, however, in the writings of these liberal, but still semi-orthodox divines, clearly indicate that the writers have caught the true spirit of the memorable words in which Emerson gives utterance to the present tendency of the highest philosophical and theological thought:—"When I see a majestic Epaminondas or Washington; when I see among my contemporaries a true orator, an upright judge, a dear friend; when I vibrate to the melody and fancy of a poem; I see beauty that it is to be desired. And so lovely, and with yet more entire consent of my human being, sounds in my ear the severe music of the bards that have sung of the true God in all ages. Now, do not degrade the life and dialogues of Christ out of the circle of this charm, by insulation and peculiarity. Let them lie as they befel, alive and warm, part of human life, and of the landscape, and of the cheerful day."

It is, perhaps, too much to expect from men who have been so long accustomed to think of Jesus as born of a virgin, and as essentially separated from the men whom he called his brethren, in virtue of his position as the second person in a triune Godhead, that they should all at once be able to divest his personality of all these ecclesiastical trappings which disfigure and disguise it, and see in the son of Joseph and Mary simply the man in whose profound religious experience we have the purest and deepest realisation of that precious consciousness of personal intimacy with the Infinite and Eternal One which is implicitly present as a divine possibility in every rational and moral creature. At any rate, it is unfortunately the fact that even the freest of these heralds of a reformed orthodoxy still persist in taking Jesus out of the category of humanity, and break the links of

natural evolution which relate him to his spiritual progenitors, the great prophets of Israel, thus placing him in an isolated non-human position, which does grievous injustice to his intrinsic worth and moral grandeur, and wholly incapacitates him for being the representative religious leader of mankind.

This being, then, the present condition of affairs in many reputedly orthodox Christian communities, one naturally looked with very great interest for Dr. Fairbairn's pronouncement on this momentous question of the relation of Jesus to the great human family. Would he show himself in real sympathy with this new movement, and use his great learning and his philosophical acumen to help these enterprising divines out of the inconsistent transitional position in which they have placed themselves, by pointing out to them that they need not hesitate to treat Jesus wholly as a man, seeing that in every man there is an implicit infinity and divinity, whereby it becomes possible for the pure in heart to really see and reveal the true character of that Supreme Being who, in a very important sense, is incarnate in all men. It was the more to be expected that Dr. Fairbairn would sympathise with these theological progressionists, because we owe to him the noteworthy utterance that it is the great achievement of the Nineteenth Century "to have rediscovered Christ"; for on the surface of it this saying appears to point to the undoubted fact that the critical researches of the present century have enabled us in great measure to penetrate to the real personality of the founder of Christianity. We are now in a position to explain the origin and growth of that strange ecclesiastical transformation whereby the great Galilean, who even declined to be called "good," because he, as a man, knew *humunum esse errare*, was ultimately converted into the second person of a mythological Trinity.

Those, however, who had hoped that Dr. Fairbairn would join hands with Dr. Martineau in tracing the power of Christianity to its true source in the grand, but quite human, personality of Jesus, will experience in the reading of the substantial volume we are noticing a grievous disappointment. So far, indeed, is Dr. Fairbairn from showing any disposition to help on the movement which Dr. Abbott and others are initiating that he really displays quite a retrogressive tendency; and not only speaks of Jesus as the *uncreated* Son of God, while all other rational beings owe their existence to God's creative, act, but he actually tries to rehabilitate the doctrine of the Trinity in its most tritheistic form, for he speaks of the Godhead as a plurality, a divine community, within which is an eternal play of reciprocal affection. He assures us also that, apart from the Trinitarian dogma, there is no access to any real insight into the *Fatherhood* of God.

It is a psychological enigma to which we can find no solution how such an excellent thinker and scholar as Dr. Fairbairn is can have persuaded himself that in the mind of Jesus the idea of God as the Father within him grew out of and depended on the previous knowledge that Jesus himself was the second person in a plural Godhead. Take, for instance, the sermon on the Mount, where, if anywhere, we have the authentic utterances of Jesus. Is it conceivable that Jesus should have uttered the sublime words, "The pure in heart shall see God," if at the very time he had been aware that the one feature in the nature of God, which is of by far the greatest interest to mankind, namely, God's fatherhood, could not be discerned by any purity of heart, however great, but must be arrived at by way of a strange theological dogma in no way accessible to the natural human mind and heart, and only to be learned through a miraculous revelation which it was the special function of Jesus as the one "uncreated" son of God, to make to humanity? We are seriously asked to believe that Jesus knew that there was only one way to obtain an insight into the fatherly nature of God, and yet omitted to say anything about this all-important mystery, and led his hearers to believe that not theological dogma of any kind, but simple purity of heart would enable the finite soul to see and know the Father within it. If we may venture to take the sayings of Jesus in the synoptic gospels as fairly representing the tenor of his teaching, we venture to assert that it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that nobody would have been more astounded than Jesus himself if any one had suggested to him that he was, what Dr. Fairbairn's book represents him to be, a being essentially different in nature from his hearers, and that while they were the creatures of "Our Father which is in heaven," he himself had been from all eternity an integral factor in the plural nature of that heavenly Father, and therefore had himself taken an essential part in the creative act by which his hearers came into existence.

But while neither Jesus himself nor his immediate hearers appear to have had the slightest idea of the wondrous position in the Godhead to which the speculative imagination of believers afterwards exalted their great teacher, it is by no means difficult to understand how this deification came about. The truth which both the grand personality of Jesus, and also his teachings, suggested and emphasised was the immanence of God in the prophet's own soul. But the early Church had by no means realised the idea, now so common in theology and philosophy, that the infinite and eternal God is really in a sense incarnate in every rational soul. The life and doctrines of Jesus furnished the great object-lesson by which this idea of the immanence of God in the souls of men was gradually apprehended and appro-

priated. It was clear to the early Church that it was no mere finite man who rose above all personal self-seeking, and really loved his fellow-creatures with quite infinite affection ; that it was no mere finite man who, even when his dearest earthly friends forsook him, could still say he was not alone, for the Father was with him. This sublime personality so towered above the average thought of his time, that it seemed to many to fall altogether out of the human category. Jesus was felt to be somehow *sui generis* ; and the question accordingly arose as to how his relation to God and to other men was to be conceived. Was he to be regarded as a being intermediate between God and man, a sort of demi-god ? Or, on the other hand, was he the historical manifestation of the eternal Divine Logos, and so co-substantial with God himself ? Between these two views, which were the alternatives before the Church at the time, it is admitted, even by the leading anti-Trinitarian thinkers, that it was a fortunate or providential event for the future of religious thought that the Homoïusian prevailed over the Homoïusian or Arian view. The Trinitarian doctrine, while it has done much mischief, and led to the persecution of some of the noblest spirits in Christendom, has done one all-important service, viz., it has constantly kept before the minds of men the vital truth that God was essentially present and active in the mind and heart of Jesus. The doctrine of the essential immanence of God in humanity was of course in the creeds strictly confined to the one unique and entirely exceptional case of Jesus of Nazareth ; but happily even against the intention and will of the creed-makers the irresistible might of analogical reasoning has imperceptibly brought thoughtful minds to see that what the Church predicated of Christ alone is really in varying degrees of fulness true of all men, and hence in a certain very true sense the saying has been fulfilled : "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men after me." But the very line of reflection which now enables us to see that the orthodox doctrine of the deity of Christ (notwithstanding its formal falsity) has subserved important ends in the spiritual education of the human race, just as clearly shows us that, so far as cultivated society in the present day is concerned, the Trinitarian dogma has done its work, and may now be quietly allowed to become obsolete, seeing that the doctrine of the immanence or incarnation of the infinite God in every finite rational soul is now generally accepted in the highest philosophy and theology of our time ; and therefore all attempts such as Dr. Fairbairn's to make an essential distinction between the incarnation of God in Jesus, and his incarnation in mankind generally, can only be regarded as unfortunate anachronisms.

Dr. Fairbairn's book is divided into two parts. The first part, which occupies more than half the volume, is historical and critical, while the second part is theological and constructive. Whatever estimate may be formed of the second part, in which Dr. Fairbairn displays an amazing insight into the inner nature and plural constitution of God — an insight attained by a method wholly different from that recommended in the beatitudes — there can be only one opinion as to the interest and value of the former part of the volume, in which the history of theological theories and of the successive phases of the philosophy of religion is graphically set forth. In the philosophical part, the views of the great German thinkers, from Kant onwards, are fully expounded. Dr. Fairbairn's attitude in regard to Hegel is somewhat difficult to understand. He sometimes lavishes on that philosopher such laudatory epithets as most Germans in the present day would consider very extravagant, while at the same time on the most vital points of religious philosophy he appears to differ from this "greatest of philosophers." The English and American theologians who fondly imagine that in Hegel they have found both a satisfactory religious philosophy and a rationale of the chief orthodox dogmas, will not derive much encouragement from the perusal of Dr. Fairbairn's work. For in the first place, as our author points out, the Hegelian second person in the Trinity is the manifestation of God in nature and in human history; and any attempt to limit this function of the *triune* God to the individual Jesus of Nazareth would be in fatal contradiction to the whole spirit of the Hegelian philosophy. And in the second place, it is clear that Dr. Fairbairn, notwithstanding his very high estimate of Hegel, has really no sympathy with the most essential feature in the Hegelian mode of philosophising, for whereas it is vital to Hegelianism to treat the whole universe of matter and mind as the evolution of thought, every stage of which is necessarily determined by its relation to the rest, Dr. Fairbairn clings with admirable firmness to the belief in the real freedom of the human will. And in this present time when there is so much said about moral freedom in ethical treatises, while the essential condition of moral freedom, viz., the possibility of an *alternative* in our moral decisions, is persistently denied, Dr. Fairbairn does a real and important service both to ethics and to the philosophy of religion by setting aside the shallow sophistry on this subject which abounds in *neo-Hegelian* literature, and by building upon the solid foundation of man's actual moral consciousness, which distinctly declares that every sinful self-determination for which a man is really blameworthy is a self-determination which need not have been.

This valuable feature in Dr. Fairbairn's moral and religious philo-

sophy is due to his careful and faithful reading of the facts of consciousness. Would that throughout the whole of the volume he had tried each article in his theological creed by this simple test, and asked himself, Does this dogma find any support in the purest and deepest experiences of man's moral and spiritual nature? Had he done this he would have written his book in precisely the same spirit in which Jesus taught, and would have uttered a voice of eminent significance at this present hour. But unfortunately he has not done so, and the whole of the second half of the volume is pervaded by that old orthodox view of "revelation" as something wholly abnormal, from which the newer theologians are earnestly striving to liberate themselves, though, as we have seen, their utterances on this point are as yet too hesitating and equivocal to afford any permanent satisfaction. The world must still, it seems, wait for another generation or two before the so-called orthodox churches, both here and in America, will gain courage enough to explicitly act upon the principle which Jesus enunciated, and openly test the truth of theological dogmas by their conformity with the profoundest deliverances of that rational, moral and spiritual experience in which the indwelling God reveals himself to the pure in heart. No one can carefully read Dr. Fairbairn's book without suspecting that this is really the test which the author is consciously or unconsciously continually applying when he seeks so to modify the interpretation of the orthodox dogmas as to bring them more into line with present ethical and spiritual ideas. Professor A. B. Bruce, indeed, in his eulogistic notice of Dr. Fairbairn's book, indirectly admits that this is his way of criticising the articles of his church, for he says, in reference to the doctrine of the Atonement:—"Would it not considerably improve matters if one could say on Scripture warrant: Christ died to satisfy, or, to use a Scripture expression, to *manifest* Divine righteousness, and Divine *love*, and in that manifestation the whole Godhead took part?" Now what does this naïve query by Dr. Bruce really imply? It seems to us to imply that we must first so interpret our dogmas as to harmonize them as much as possible with our own deepest ethical and religious convictions, and then hunt up some scripture warrant, if we can, to justify this new reading of ours.

But Dr. Fairbairn has evidently no clear consciousness that, in his revision of orthodox ideas, he is simply applying the rational method of gaining religious insight which Jesus enjoined; and, indeed, if we may judge from this present volume, he would be among the very last to admit that it is in virtue of his own native spiritual discernment that he criticises and rejects the more glaring absurdities in

the popular orthodox views. He evidently believes, and wishes his readers to believe, that it is only through a more accurate study of what is involved in the mysterious and wholly exceptional mode of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, that any theologian can gain truer insight into the fundamentals of religious belief.

So engrossed, indeed, is Dr. Fairbairn's mind with the notion that Christ came to supply an invaluable miraculous appendix to that general body of ethical and religious ideas which is accessible to the normal human mind, that he does manifest and gross injustice to those earlier Hebrew prophets and psalmists with whose profound and inspiring religious utterances the teachings of Jesus have so much in common. He tells us, for instance, that, previous to the advent of Jesus, even the greatest Jewish thinkers and prophets were not real Monotheists. "Christ," he says, "is the real creator of Monotheism. Before and apart from him we have Naturalisms, Polytheisms, Pantheisms, and a Henotheism, which is the term most characteristic of Judaism as it was and is; but it is only through him, and within Christendom, that Monotheism has come to be, and has been incorporated in a real and realised religion" (p. 378). There are few instances on record, we think, in which a writer's dogmatic prepossessions have more completely biassed and perverted his judgment. Was that prophet no Monotheist who exclaimed, "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number"? Was it merely a Henotheistic idea of deity which inspired the Deuteronomist to say, "The word of God is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it"? Or is it imaginable for a moment that the author of the drama of Job was simply thinking of the pre-eminence of the national God of the Hebrews when, in speaking of man's endeavour to comprehend the Almighty, he exclaims, "It is high as heaven: what canst thou do? Deeper than Sheol: what canst thou know?" It was not thus that Jesus judged of his own relation to those great prophets of his race in whose immortal words he found the true bread of life.

But not only does Dr. Fairbairn's excessive reverence for his favourite orthodox dogma lead him into a wholly unjustifiable disparagement of the great predecessors of Jesus, but this same attempt to de-humanise Jesus, while it is intended to exalt and magnify him, really and inevitably, however unintentionally, robs the personality of the founder of Christianity of its intrinsic ethical grandeur and spiritual sublimity. The true moral greatness of Jesus consists in this, that alike in his earlier temptations, which find expression in the story of his encounter with Satan, and in the last mental struggle in Gethsemane, his sacrifice of personal pleasure, and his ethical decision

for God and for humanity, were prompted solely by reverence for the moral sentiment, or, in other words, by pure devotion to the Father within him. This, as Kant so clearly saw and taught, is the true measure of pure, unadulterated moral worth. In many of the early Christians who became martyrs in the cause of religion, it is not improbable that the expectation of, and the craving for, the speedy enjoyment of heavenly raptures may have mingled as powerful motives in determining their readiness for martyrdom, and to that extent they sink ethically far below their great exemplar. There is every reason to think that not a vestige of such vulgar motives vitiated Christ's supreme act of self-surrender. But, now, assume for a moment that Dr. Fairbairn and the great body of orthodox theologians are right, and that, therefore, the young Galilean prophet was well aware, alike in the wilderness and in Gethsemane, that, though he outwardly seemed to be simply the son of Joseph and Mary of the little town of Nazareth, he had really, through eternity, occupied a wholly unique position in the plural constitution of God, and that, after his short missionary experience and the brief agony of crucifixion, he should forthwith resume his transcendent position in the Godhead. Assume likewise, as according to the orthodox authorities we needs must, that Jesus was so constituted that it is inconceivable and impossible that he should ever have yielded to any one of the so-called temptations of which the Evangelists speak, and what, we ask, becomes of the personality of Jesus when these speculative theologians have been allowed to fit it into its proper place in their ingenious dogmatic scheme? Surely the result is this, that by these assumptions the Christ of the creeds becomes a being intrinsically incapable of manifesting any real moral greatness and heroism, and the ethical and spiritual value of his life is virtually nullified; for a being who lives and acts under wholly exceptional and non-human conditions is valueless as a revealer of the moral and spiritual possibilities of human nature.

Surely, then, the Christ which the nineteenth century is rediscovering is by no means a slightly modified edition of the second person of the Athanasian Trinity, but is the genuine son of Joseph and Mary, whose noble and divine life is of inexhaustible and perennial worth, not because it exhibits an abnormal and exceptional incarnation of God in humanity, but because it bears conspicuous and unmistakeable testimony to the normal incarnation of God in the souls of men, and, therefore, to the infinite spiritual possibilities which are open to all human beings who follow Jesus in seeking to be perfect as the Father within them is perfect. This is the natural

"position in modern theology" in which the advocates of the "new orthodoxy," whether they consciously intend it or not, are effectually helping to place Jesus; and we cannot but express our regret that so powerful a writer as Dr. Fairbairn is, should, throughout a large portion of this volume, have vainly spent his strength in trying to check and force back the inevitable advance of the tide of modern criticism and theological thought. This advancing tide is evidently undermining and destroying all those ecclesiastical fictions whereby a well-meaning but undiscerning reverence has de-humanised and disguised Israel's greatest prophet and the representative exponent and interpreter of that religious side of human nature which puts man in personal relations with the self-existent and eternal principle of reason and of love in whom all finite creatures live and move and have their being. Such destruction must be regarded in the present condition of philosophical and theological thought as a real and unmixed gain; for the personality of Jesus when revealed as it is now being revealed by reverent criticism, in all the true divinity of its simple humanity, will, in virtue of its intrinsic grandeur and beauty, far more than regain that influence over cultivated minds which the second person in the Trinity has irrevocably lost. The profound religious experience portrayed in the Bible, with the life and authentic utterances of Jesus as its culminating expression, will be studied with increased earnestness and enthusiasm, as presenting the highest historical manifestation of that personal and ethical relationship between the finite soul and the infinite Father, the realisation of which with typical richness and purity is the specific and quite inestimable contribution cast by the genius of the Hebrew race into the world's intellectual and spiritual treasury.

CHARLES B. UPTON.

Origin and Sources of the Shulchan Aruch and the Sepher Assufoth.
By Dr. M. GASTER. (Third Report of Judith Montefiore College, 1892-93.)

WE are glad to mention that the Rev. Principal of the Ramsgate College continues steadily the Continental system of the Rabbinical schools in publishing learned essays together with the yearly programme of the institution, and above all that he makes good use of the important collection of books and MSS. belonging to the College. This time Dr. Gaster gives a compressed sketch of the *Shulchan Aruch*, by the famous R. Joseph Caro (1488—1575), and the previous litera-